

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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ACTION

January 13, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: GENERAL HAIG

FROM: ASHLEY C. HEWITT

SUBJECT: Reported Bolivian Dissatisfaction with
US Military Assistance

[REDACTED] 25X1

Bolivian President Banzer and his military chiefs were angry and disappointed at the level of military assistance received from the United States, and at the poor performance of the US under the Military Assistance Program. I pressed State for an assessment of the validity of Bolivian complaints, and State in turn asked our Embassy in La Paz for an assessment. A reply has now been received (cable at Tab A).

The Embassy indicates [REDACTED] 25X1

somewhat exaggerated, but says that President Banzer and the Bolivian military are feeling deeply frustrated by US performance to date under the Military Assistance Program. The Embassy points out that the program does not differ from the one already promised to leftist President Torres before his overthrow. However, it indicates that Bolivian frustration arises not so much from the overall levels of military assistance programmed for the next three years as from the glacial pace of deliveries under the program. The fact is that aside from training President Banzer's security guard and delivering a moderate amount of small arms ammunition, there has been no action under the military assistance program since President Banzer assumed power. Moreover, substantial deliveries still appear to be considerably in the future. The Embassy emphasizes that the Bolivian need is now. Rightly or wrongly, the Bolivians perceive significant security threats in the near future, and talk of armored personnel carrier deliveries in 1974 is of no interest or use to them.

The Embassy believes that there are areas where we can speed up assistance without significant increases in the cost of the total military assistance package to which we are already committed. It contends that a speedup of deliveries could contribute meaningfully to Bolivia's

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psychological needs and real military effectiveness. Specifically, the Embassy recommends that we move quickly to assist the Bolivian Army in equipping two of the five mobile regiments presently planned. The Embassy also believes we could be more immediately responsive to Bolivia's requests for jet aircraft. Under the present program, we are considering delivery of one or two A-37Bs a year over the next several years under the grant program but no decision has yet been made. The Embassy understands from President Banzer that the Government now plans to submit a request to purchase six A-37Bs under the FMS program. The Embassy urges favorable and priority action on this request when it is submitted.

Our inadequate performance in the military assistance field, as perceived by President Banzer and his military chiefs, is symptomatic of the problems we face in Latin America as a whole and our method of dealing with them. US interests were critically threatened by the leftist Torres regime, and we moved rapidly to support the Banzer Government when it came to power last August. Once the immediate crisis passed, however, our interest subsided and our programs became bogged down in the bureaucratic underbrush. The facts of life in Bolivia are that the country is inherently unstable and will continue to be whether its government is of the right, the center or the left. Failure to support adequately a government which is favorable to our interests only insures that the pendulum will swing the other way in short order, and that before very long we will be back where we were before the overthrow of the Torres government last August.

I recommend that you call Armistead Selden and explore the possibilities of speeding up deliveries under the Military Assistance Program in order to meet Bolivia's most pressing requirements and improve the psychological atmosphere. It seems to me we ought to be able to equip at least one of the mobile regiments on a crash basis and the other within a year. In addition, trickling in A-37Bs one or two at a time may make sense from the economic point of view, but it can only have an adverse effect on the government and the military in a political and psychological sense. Although I am not an expert, I also doubt the military usefulness of this approach. I suggest we find ways to provide Bolivia with at least six A-37Bs simultaneously in order to form a minimum working squadron.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you call Armistead Selden and explore the possibilities of speeding up deliveries to Bolivia under the Military Assistance Program.

Approve ☒

Called ☒

Disapprove ☐